

# A Look at Iran's Recent Upsurge

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What's going on in Iran right now is without a doubt an intense scene of class struggle throughout the country. But the fact that you can't sense any one particular class characteristic in the current spontaneous movement, or in other words, the fact that its class nature looks murky is because of two main factors: a) the very class composition of revolution in Iran, and b) the state and balance of power within the forces of revolution.

On the one hand, we see a growing working class who's been faced with capitalist exploitation on an unfathomable scale while being kept deprived of the most basic rights such as the vital right of forming an independent class assembly and organization. And on the other hand, we are faced with considerable sectors of the rural and urban petite-bourgeoisie which is commonly known as "the middle class". From small-scale producers which have been squeezed to the bone and are shrinking progressively like small farmers, fishermen and various types of craftsmen, to local, minor entrepreneurs such as shop keepers and vendors, to salaried employees such as teachers or nurses, to professionals such as doctors, lawyers, university graduates, artists, and an array of intellectuals, etc.

What brings all these sectors together is a common enemy: the state; a dictatorial regime that serves the interests of the big bourgeoisie of which itself is a major part since bureaucratic capitalism (the state) is not only the largest employer throughout the country but is also in total control of all socio-economic and political spheres of life. This characteristic of the ruling regime has created a systematic and sharp polarization in the fabric of society, and as a result, masses of people from various walks of life are suffering in one way or another while a relatively small portion of the population is enjoying a parasitic life whether as private or bureaucratic capitalists.

Consequently, in the class war that's being waged right now, we see two main camps: one that includes all those exploited, squeezed and suppressed, and the other which includes the ruling bourgeoisie and its representative political apparatus; the government.

At this stage, what's happening is a general fight waged by a variegated amalgamation of people against their common enemy. And of course, fighting the same enemy by no means suggests that all the layers within the people's camp have a single demand (let's say freedom) or a single alternative in mind (let's say a political revolution/regime change). No! There is a pile of accumulated demands and grievances that for years have remained unanswered. These demands and

grievances encompass all the economic, social and political affairs of society. From massive unemployment, extreme poverty and homelessness, to low wages and even overdue unpaid wages up to months, to inhumane working conditions, to the lack of labour rights, to the lawless and unbearable rising cost of living, and from the suppression of ethnic, religious and sexual minority groups, to the lack of fundamental human rights such as freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, etc., to even some of the most basic individual liberties such as choosing what to wear which especially and directly affects Iranian women who are also subject to severe gender inequality not only in the workplace but also socially and domestically.

So these are some of the people's most burning grievances which have boiled up to a point of explosion. In such a situation, anything can ignite the rage amassed in people and lead to an upsurge as we have seen in the past and we are seeing right now. Obviously, these upsurges are spontaneous and sporadic. However, the lack of leadership and a pre-formulated manifesto, or what communists refer to as a "Revolutionary Program" by no means renders these upsurges useless and in vain. No!

In fact, the very weaknesses inherent in these upsurges bring to light, however bitterly, the need and the necessity to overcome them. This is the dialectic of development: the transformation of negative into positive, which spirals towards an inevitability. That is to say, the absence of leadership or manifesto in these upsurges, in itself, begs for their emergence without which the very shortcomings or flaws appear and reappear until they are addressed and resolved; a point that exhibits a form of "inevitability" in the process of development.

So, contrary to the cynical remarks of the defeatists, these spontaneous and sporadic upsurges are not fruitless, even if they fall. They always produce lessons, and as these lessons are absorbed, they gradually elevate the general awareness of the masses and in turn influence the course of people's struggle against their enemies. Every time these spontaneous and sporadic upsurges occur; every time they come to the surface, the colossal power of the masses is revealed. These upsurges, these sparks shine through the thick clouds of despotism, and when the flare of the people's rage pours onto the streets, it gives hope and strength to the rest of the oppressed.

In short, although these upsurges may not survive; although they may be doomed to die away, even their very fall continually leads, as we have seen, to a new rise. And undoubtedly, these rises and falls leave their mark and lessons; lessons which can pave the road towards a coherent, well organized, well thought-out revolution.

Therefore, while no one can really determine the emergence or the frequency of these upsurges, their course of development and their process of refinement is something we can delve into and be part of, and I think we must.

Let us get back to the class composition of these upsurges and its reflection in the mindset of the makers of these upsurges and the direction they take.

As mentioned earlier, this and previous upsurges clearly show that the class nature and objectives of these social revolts are not homogeneous but rather heterogeneous. They contain an array of concerns from multiple sectors in society. From the most radical socio-economic and political demands which can only be brought about through a social revolution, to mere individual liberties which may be attained through reforms or at most through a political revolution coexist side by side within the broad demography of these rebellions.

Having that in mind, it is quite natural that different social groups; different social classes or layers perceive the existing realities within the framework of their respective class interests and vision (class outlook) which configures not only their concerns but also their alternatives.

However, this should not be taken in a mechanical sense. Simply being a member of a particular class doesn't automatically and always lead that member toward a particular direction. That is to say, just as a class-conscious worker would aim for a leap from capitalism towards socialism, one without class-consciousness may conversely settle with a number of reforms and not uphold the flag of a social revolution. Or, just as a member of the middle class naturally fights for some improvements in their lifestyle and isn't necessarily interested in changing the socio-economic and political system altogether, another one may leave their class interests/outlook and join those who aim for a fundamental revolution in the social relations of production and distribution of wealth in society. Therefore, it is the nature and the degree of class consciousness that guides and leads them not their mere class membership.

At the moment, these social groups and their tendencies are scattered all across the board and not consolidated into a single revolutionary manifesto in my opinion. (\*) But without a doubt, in the course of further development, they might very well steer towards this or that emerging alternative, and go under the leadership of whichever social force that is able to pull all the other forces under its banner and is capable of playing a hegemonic role out there.

Now, having been deprived for decades of a democratic environment within which social groups can freely and without persecution organize their members and pursue and promote their views, none of the players of these social upsurges

is organized enough and has the hegemonic sway to persuade the others towards its horizon, especially and more painfully, the working class of Iran.

Unlike the middle class which has a greater chance to form its own independent assemblies (since they pose a lesser threat to the ruling system) and which basically has more resources and ways to organize, the working class in Iran hasn't even been allowed to form its own independent economic organizations let alone form a political organization. This has put the working class in a unique disadvantage: on the one hand, it is the only social force that can truly offer a reliable alternative to the capitalist order and pull all other oppressed sectors out of the hellish life the system has imposed on them, but on the other hand, it is in a lesser position to do so. Not only because of lack of organization, but also because it lacks a cohesive revolutionary program— and no, I don't mean the Communist Manifesto.

The economic struggles of Iranian workers have been ongoing and intense for years. There have been thousands of strikes all over the country in recent years. Great sacrifices have been made, great experiences have been gained, yet the Iranian working class hasn't been able to establish its own economic, or even worse, its own political organization. Why not?

The reason is straightforward and simple: what has mainly prevented them from doing so has been decades of dictatorship and repression by the ruling regime. One can imagine if workers in a country are deprived of forming even their own independent economic organizations such as trade-unions, what would the chances be to form a political organization such as a communist party!? And if workers don't have these organizations, then how on earth can they lead? How can they impose their will as a class on their oppressors; the capitalists? How can they mobilize a large enough force to overthrow the capitalist regime? How can they ever make their social revolution?

Now let us take a look at the Iranian working class's ally; the middle class.

Generally speaking and by definition, the petite-bourgeoisie (the middle class) lacks an independent class outlook or socio-economic alternative to offer— even though some may think that between Capitalism and Communism, there is a "Third Way". Instead, and by nature, the petite-bourgeoisie looks up to bourgeois ideologies and builds upon them, or conversely, is affected by the communist outlook and struggles against the bourgeoisie, and even builds its own version of socialism. In other words, depending on the circumstances, the petite-bourgeoisie can move horizontally along the class spectrum and fluctuate between either end: Capitalist reality or the Communist alternative.

This dual characteristic which, in a sense, turns the middle class into a double edged sword, is clearly visible on a global scale in today's socio-political atmosphere where the communist movement, as the only movement capable of eradicating the capitalist anti-human system, is faced with disillusionment and dispersion, and is in crisis. Only a look at the state of the intellectual community and the views held and disseminated by them today demonstrates a great retreat from the radical ideas and standpoints they used to hold when the international communist movement was mighty or at least in the state of flow. This shift, in my opinion, is the direct consequence of the current debilitated state of the world communist movement; a state in which, for instance, Engels is being convicted for diversion while Kautsky is being resurrected for guidance, and in which "revolutionary force" is either replaced by "civil disobedience" or is reduced to "revolutionary reform".

Under these circumstances, and at the moment, the middle class is less inclined to join the fight for socialism as a total change (social revolution), and is content with partial changes such as reforms or at most, a political revolution. And obviously, the middle class in Iran is not immune to this phase of regression.

This is a general overview of the composition of social forces at work on the streets of Iran. But this still isn't sufficient to give a clear and accurate image of the rebellion. In other words, it does not explain as to how the sons and daughters; the men and women of the oppressed people of Iran, that is the Iranian working class and the petite-bourgeoisie, display so much radicalism and self-sacrifice especially when the revolutionary communist movement is in crisis everywhere, and all other revolutionaries of the past now are in the state of ebb and not flow. What is indeed the source of their awareness? What is the source of their courage? What propels them to rise up against this brutal repressive regime despite the dire consequences? The shortest answer to all these can be summed in one word: reality.

The oppressed people of Iran, even the most conservative segments of them, have simply learned in practice that they cannot attain their rights and demands through dialogue and peaceful means. And this realization is the engine behind the magnificent upsurge we are witnessing today. A realization that has led to becoming more radical; more mighty than a great majority of the Iranian "left" as well as all civil society activists. The young men and women and all the others who light up the country every night with their explosive heroism, and turn days into nightmares for the regime have started their locomotive of change and have turned their backs to the conciliatory, illusive vehicles of reformist tendencies. That is why they resort to offensive moves as opposed to defensive methods of fighting such as asking for reforms; for some improvements, such as changing this or that law. In fact, a look at some of their slogans shows how far ahead they are

from most civil liberty activists and even some of the Iranian “left”. They have been chanting “Death to the Oppressors, be it a King, be it a Supreme-Leader!”, “I will Avenge whoever Killed my Sister!”, “Be Afraid of the Day We Arm Ourselves!”, “We are Female and Male Worriers, You want War, Bring it on!”, “Down with the Islamic Republic!” or “Down with Dictators!”, etc.

So, clearly they have passed the phase of demanding to shut down the Morality Police or loosening the trampling of civil liberties. It isn’t just about the Hijab, it isn’t just about women’s rights, it isn’t about getting concessions, and it is definitely not a return to the past; the shepherd-cattle era of Monarchy as the Royalists daydream either. Nor is it a socialist revolution on the horizon as most of the Iranian “left” illusively imagine and hope it to be. Rather, it is a broad and democratic rebellion by the suffocating masses of people under a despotic regime, aiming at the overthrow of dictatorship and basically fighting for freedom and social justice. In other words, they are fighting for democracy. But what kind of democracy could that be?

Logically, it can’t be a bourgeois democracy since even the greatest of bourgeois democracies are filled with injustices, social inequalities, discrimination, crimes against humanity and long list of other social ills.

What kind of democracy then do they have in mind?

Whatever kind of democracy that may be, only the course of events; only the actual evolution of this spontaneous yet glorious upsurge will tell. But one thing is crystal clear, and that is their determination; their will to bring about change.

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\*) Albeit the slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom” has been perceived by many as a predominant rallying cry, and some even consider it the Strategic Slogan of A Revolution. But just as we must not dismiss or downplay the importance of these upsurges in the course of people’s struggle, we must also not exaggerate and idealize their reality and initial capacities.

Keeping that in mind, the fact remains that just as all spontaneous upsurges are the manifestation of sudden social eruptions and not a well organized and well formulated revolutionary movement, their slogans too should be considered accordingly. And just as spontaneous upsurges may or may not develop into a social revolution depending on the direction they may take, their slogans too may evolve and transform into other slogans.

